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# The Process and Implications of Doing Qualitative Research: An Analysis of 54 Doctoral Dissertations

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*The number of social work doctoral dissertations following qualitative research methods tripled in the ten year period from 1982 to 1992. The purpose of the current study was to understand the qualitative research process of 54 social work dissertations completed between 1986 and 1993. The two general reasons for following a qualitative design were the researcher's dissatisfaction with current theory to explain the studied phenomena and the desire to implement participant driven research. Much was written by the dissertation authors about the place of theory in qualitative research and the mutual influences between the researcher and researched. The study results were discussed within the context of current qualitative/quantitative debates in social work. This is an important study for graduate faculty and students as qualitative research methods are being required in graduate social work education and more is being published on the expected standards of qualitative research.*

## Introduction and Research Purpose

This is both an exciting and a confusing time for social workers who are considering the use of qualitative research. The excitement stems from the recent publication of two edited texts which provide systematic, empirical applications of qualitative research conducted by social workers (Riessman, 1994; Sherman & Reid, 1994). The confusion comes from critiques of whether qualitative research is a valid approach to science (Bloom, 1995; Wakefield, 1995; Wakefield & Kirk, 1996) and whether there should be one set of standards that applies to the scientific rigor of all social

work research, qualitative or quantitative (Imre, 1994; Mullen, 1995; Reid, 1994).

Qualitative studies often include first-person disclosures of the politics, awareness, and new discoveries of the research process. Qualitative research is a perspective (Ruckdeschel, 1985), a world view, a philosophy of knowledge building. "Beliefs about the nature of social reality and how we are to know it (ontology and epistemology) shape which method we choose, which questions we ask, and what counts as knowledge" (Riessman, 1994, p. xii). A qualitative perspective recognizes that the researcher is the primary research instrument and that documenting the interaction between the researcher and participants is an integral component of the knowledge generating process (Ruckdeschel, 1985; Ruckdeschel, Earnshaw, & Firrek, 1994).

The purpose of the current study is to respond to the need for more detailed discussion of the qualitative research process (Allen-Meares, 1995; Imre, 1994; Riessman, 1994). How do persons conduct qualitative research within the context of the current qualitative/quantitative discussions in social work? The purposive sample for this study consisted of 54 qualitative research dissertations in social work published between January 1, 1986 and December 31, 1993. Dissertations were chosen for the current analysis because they typically contain much detail about the research process, the authors may be immersed in the academic debates surrounding qualitative research, and many doctoral students might be using qualitative research for the first time after being trained primarily in quantitative methods. Like Hyde's (1994) "reflection on a journey", this study aimed to help the reader "gain insight into the research enterprise and assurances from revelations of an imperfect process" (p. 170).

I was drawn to qualitative research for the first time during my doctoral studies in social work. One of the difficulties for me was to unlearn the assumptions of quantitative research approaches. For example, my lengthy reflective journals documenting the relationship between emerging themes, theories, researcher bias, and research decisions were dissonant with the belief that all efforts should be taken to control researcher objectivity. Describing how the credibility and trustworthiness of the data were achieved by analyzing research journals, consulting with peer debriefers

to critique initial data analysis, discussing the results with the participants, or applying other sound methods of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were very different tasks than those demonstrating that the methodology achieved validity and reliability by consistently measuring the hypothesized variables.

My first exposure to qualitative research was a philosophy of science course which gave thorough discussion to the difference between positivist and post-positivist paradigms of research (Lather, 1986, 1991). "A paradigm is a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world" (Patton, 1990). A positivist paradigm represents the position that social science can create experimental conditions where the researcher is totally removed from any influence on the expected outcomes of the study. A study meets empirical rigor if it follows the rules which assume that the experimental conditions were present. A post-positivist paradigm recognizes that there is a mutual relationship between the knower and the known. Rather than trying to control researcher subjectivity, a post-positivist researcher recognizes her/his biases of the research questions (Lather, 1991). Heineman [Pieper] (1981) pointed out the following limitations of positivism, which she termed logical empiricism: "The adoption of the logical empiricist view of science has had the grave consequence of prohibiting researchers from studying many important questions, using much valuable data, and researching social interactions in all their complexities" (p. 390).

I conducted a qualitative research dissertation because I was drawn to the philosophical views of science underlying a post-positivist paradigm even though I was a beginner at understanding such a paradigm. I propose that many graduate students and social workers choose not to use qualitative research because conveying the epistemological clarity of the study is so difficult even when the research problem might warrant a qualitative research design. Other doctoral students in social work who conducted qualitative research dissertations have much to share about the complexities of embracing a qualitative research perspective. By shedding light on some of the issues and struggles faced in these

dissertations, more social worker graduate students and practitioners may choose to master the use of qualitative research.

### Methodology

This is a qualitative study of qualitative studies. The purpose of this study is to understand the qualitative research process as it was written by authors of selected dissertations in social work and to analyze these data within the context of current discussions in social work about qualitative research. The published dissertations were the primary source of data. A purposive sampling method was chosen to locate dissertations in which the authors would provide an in-depth discussion of the rationales for choosing a qualitative design and the issues they faced when doing qualitative research.

The University of Michigan International (UMI) Dissertation Abstracts CD-ROM was the data base used for this study. Conducting a search of dissertation abstracts containing the words "social work and qualitative" during the time period of January 1, 1988 to September 1, 1993 resulted in 229 abstracts. This number included studies which used only qualitative methods as well as those which used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The same search for the previous five year time period (January 1, 1982 to December 31, 1987) only resulted in 71 abstracts, another indicator of the increased attention given to qualitative research in social work.

For the time period from January 1, 1988 to September 1, 1993, a search of the UMI data base was done to locate social work dissertation abstracts which contained the terms "qualitative research", "qualitative study", or "qualitative analysis". Dissertations were only chosen from persons receiving a DSW or Ph.D. from a School or College of Social Work in the United States. This process generated twenty-five abstracts.

One limitation to this sampling method was that a person could have conducted a qualitative study but not have identified this research approach in the dissertation title or abstract. To address this limitation, a second abstract search was conducted by using the Find command to match "social work and" the following key words: feminist, interpretive, naturalistic, or ethnography, because qualitative research is often conducted within these

research paradigms. Twenty-five new studies not contained in the original sample were now generated for analysis.

A third abstract search was conducted to include possible qualitative studies across cultures. Using the key words "social work and" Afrocentric, African American, Black, multicultural, race, or culture generated four more studies which did utilize a qualitative research design. One of these studies was actually published in 1986. This study (Colorado, 1986) was kept in the sample because it was the only study to focus on Native Americans and it provided rich, descriptive data about the research process. The cultures of the participants and researchers across all 54 studies included India, Native America, Central America, African American, Korea, and China.

Statements in the dissertation which explained the reason for using qualitative research were highlighted. In general, these statements were usually one to three paragraphs for each study (a much smaller amount than predicted) and were often taken from the Methods section. Two research assistants then entered the highlighted data into the *Ethnograph* software on an IBM computer. This software allowed for sorting of the rationales for qualitative research according to common patterns across all 54 studies.

There were ten dissertations which provided much more detail about the qualitative research process than the other dissertations in the study. Discussion of these issues were dispersed throughout the Introduction, Methodology, and Summary sections of the dissertations. Content from these ten studies related to the interaction between the researcher and the participants and the place of theory in the study was highlighted in the text. The highlighted data were then entered into the computer software. Common themes were identified using theoretical coding analyses suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990). I kept conceptual memos of emerging themes. Additionally, I continually questioned whether the assumptions that underlied the meaning of the codes related to the research problem (Tyson, 1992).

This study followed a constructivist paradigm of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guha, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I was expecting that dissertation authors would discuss how the interactions with the participants and the data created new constructions of the studied phenomena. Thus, some qualitative research

studies may have been omitted because the authors did not write about the researcher/participant interaction. Also, I constructed my study through my reading of the dissertations without speaking directly to the authors. The peer reviewer and I did not feel it was necessary to interview the authors, because we were expecting to find clear and detailed discussion of the paradigms guiding the qualitative research process.

I also followed a heuristic paradigm of social work (Tyson, 1992; Heineman [Pieper], 1981) which focuses on the choices I made in data collection and data analysis related to the research problem. I organized the dissertation data according to themes grounded from the dissertations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then, I utilized these descriptions to try to untangle current issues debated in social work about qualitative research. The current research goal is mine, not necessarily that of the dissertation authors. The value of the sample selection is in bringing together several different perspectives of using qualitative research. The analysis at the end of this paper only pertains to the research questions I posed. A more thorough analysis of other important knowledge gained from the dissertations, such as comparing the methodologies used, would constitute another study.

The consultation of another social worker who had conducted qualitative research was utilized to discuss sampling, coding, and interpretation decisions. A thorough log documenting research decisions was kept. Preliminary findings of this study received analytical and theoretical feedback from other qualitative researchers when presented at a conference on clinical social work and qualitative research.

### Findings

The Findings section is organized according to three categories. *Why Qualitative Research?* contains the themes, *Understanding the Participants' Lived Experiences* and questions *That Don't Fit Current Theories*. The category, *Wrestling with Theory*, describes the paradigms guiding the qualitative research process. The final category is, *Researcher/Participant Interactions*, and includes the themes, *Researcher's Lived Experiences*, *Insider or Outsider?*, and *Empowerment*.

*Why Qualitative Research?*

Two common reasons were given to justify that the research question should be analyzed through qualitative research: because it offers a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences related to the studied question and because the current state of knowledge does not explain the studied phenomena.

*Understanding the Participants' Lived Experiences.* Participants' experiences, subjective meanings, and contexts were encouraged and included in the knowledge built from qualitative research. In a study of teenage parents and the prevention of child sexual abuse, Snaveley (1991) was "open to understand the teen mother's attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors from her own frame of reference rather than one imposed by the investigator" (52). Sandell's (1993) study of feminist social workers supported "the feminist perspective that women's experiences, ideas and needs can be legitimately valued in their own right" (68). Greenlee (1992), in his naturalistic inquiry into rural poverty, discovered "the subjective meaning and multiple realities of the problems that the working poor encounter in their daily lives" (33). In a study of Black teen mother's perspectives on pregnancy and childbearing, Williams (1989) concluded that "listening to teen mothers and putting their actions in the context of their upbringing is a neglected aspect of the teenage parenting issue" (176).

There are many benefits for social work practice generated by actively including the participants' perspectives in the research process. Glynn (1991) stated that the vignettes created from women who self-identified as being infertile "admonish those dealing with infertile women to cease confusing them with those who elect childlessness" (384). Peled (1993) interviewed children who witnessed woman abuse about the children's experiences of living with this violence and discovered that the research process was empowering for the children. "We give them a message that what they think is important for us and that they have valuable things to teach" (228). Shepherd (1990) saw the study of organizational structure in a shelter for battered women as creating "mutual learning for both the subject and the researcher" (18).

Qualitative research methods bring the researcher in direct interaction with the participants which aids in understanding



the complexities of human behavior. In a study of caseworkers in India, Ejaz (1988) stated, "the social sciences have searched for respectability and 'white collar' status in the modern professional fields by adopting methods which are logical and defensible, but which often prove to be inadequate measures of complex human behavior and interaction" (69). And Bagwe (1989) affirmed a similar position in her study of women caste in India. "It is my hope that academic work particularly in the humanities and social sciences will increasingly evolve as a process of more human sharing and identification with the 'subjects,' in a departure from the earlier tradition of the neo-colonialists' fragmented view of the 'Martians;' and that artificial walls in intellectual enterprise will be dissolved in favor of a more holistic, humanizing approach to understanding complex schema" (25).

*Questions That Don't Fit Current Theories.* Several persons asserted that the current state of knowledge did not address the research question they were investigating. More importantly, current theories guided social work interventions and policies which were confining and oppressive toward the persons social workers intended to help. From Wright's (1991) study of being lesbian in a heterosexual culture came the acknowledgment that "a lack of agreement about operational definitions was particularly noteworthy since it demonstrates that no one really knows who fits into the category 'lesbian' or 'homosexual'" (63-64). Colorado (1986) used a research design that was "bicultural and qualitative. This makes sense; Indian alcoholism occurs in bicultural context and the research to have validity must address the needs of both Indian and non-Indian scientific communities" (193). Morrell (1990) began her study of women who intentionally chose childlessness with a critique of developmental theories which assume all partnered women desire to have children. "Unconscious or uncritical acceptance of a pro-mothering stance leads therapists, even with the best of intentions, to undermine the reproductive self-determination of their women clients" (4-5).

Knowledge building from the qualitative research process emerged from a thick description of the research focus that would not be captured from quantitative analysis. Rycraft (1990), in his study of public child welfare workers, stated "the use of a qualita-

tive design lent itself to the discovery of unpredicted and context-related findings as it allowed for the capture of the breadth, depth, and fabric of employee retention" (67–68). Goodman (1990) studied staff perspectives of caring for terminally-ill clients in an acute care hospital and recognized the value of qualitative methods "in describing a social reality with empirical richness and in generating—not testing—hypotheses" (90). Describing Chinese ethnic organizations in California, Wang (1993) concluded, "although some of the observations made can be translated into numbers, the organizations themselves are organic and display attitudes and behaviors which cannot be quantified" (32).

### *Wrestling with Theory*

One challenge for the doctoral student researchers was how to achieve a balance between presenting the participants' lived experiences and connecting these experiences to what is known about the research question. How does a researcher interact with the theories she/he brings to the setting and stay open to new explanations drawn from the interactions with the participants?

One response was to reflect on the influence of *a priori* theories the researcher brought to the study. For example, Peled (1993) explained, "two substantive theories, resiliency and symbolic interaction, influenced my interest in certain aspects of children's experience of witnessing violence, and thus, 'biased' the research" (34). Goodman (1990) described discrepancies between the initial literature review and the knowledge generated from the participants. "As these discrepancies became apparent, I was able to reframe some of the formulations developed for this project, and track down the sources of these changes" (94).

Viewing the literature review as data led to new interpretations of the other data collected in the studies. Colorado (1986) noted that her study marked "an important change in Diné alcohol literature. From this point, Diné would be recognized as contemporary human beings, not as archaeological artifacts. We would continue to be seen as people with emotion, intellect, and as being subject to social pressures" (28). Wright (1991) inquired how lesbians interviewed in her study would respond to theories which place heterosexist culture as the norm. "Viewing these findings in light of the clinical literature, it is striking the degree to

which the earlier theory and research on lesbians was reflective of the same cultural attitudes that the research participants believe still exist" (189). Bagwe (1989) also discovered unexpected results. "A second major contribution of this study, particularly in terms of feminist research, is the finding that the men are also oppressed by the women themselves, in many subtle or overt ways of manipulative dehumanization. While the earth is slipping from under the feet of the rural poor, the wages of patriarchy are just as harsh against individual disenfranchised men, as against women" (479–480).

Researchers also wrestled with conveying the rigor of the findings. Here are the steps three researchers took not to let standards of traditional science obstruct the knowledge developed from the participants' perspectives. "For Indian Science to have validity, it must be based on truth found by the individual who follows a certain sequence of truth-seeking ways. In this research, I have followed these ways: Pipe, Sweat Lodge, Peyote Ceremonies, Vision Fast" (Colorado, 1986, 195). "However, without generalizing and risking the danger of stereotyping, we are left with the alternative of doing nothing, ignoring differences, and treating all alike as if the 'melting pot' phenomenon was a reality. . . . This sample does not purport to be representative of all West Indian families but it is the social and cultural realities of all the families presented from their world view and has significance and importance within its own context" (Thrasher, 1988, 187–188). "One limitation to the study was the research instrument. What I have told and interpreted was what I saw and understood. Another person, an American, a woman, a minority person, a Native American would see differently and tell the story differently. Just as my own biography framed the question so has it framed the interpretation. It must always be that" (McMahon, 1993, 70).

### *Researcher/Participant Interaction*

"The role of the researcher in any qualitative project is so important a variable that the researcher's social position and relationship must be taken into account" (Thrasher, 1988, 47). Why do qualitative researchers assert that the subjective positions of the researcher need to be taken into account? The main reason is that the researcher needs to explain how she/he arrived at

understanding the participants' experiences within the explanations produced by science. Three areas are discussed here: the influence of the researcher's lived experience on the study; the impact that being an insider or outsider has on the study; and achieving the goal of participant and researcher empowerment through qualitative research.

*Researcher's Lived Experiences.* Researchers' own rich life experiences are part of the research context. "I begin with the 'given' that my view, much as I wish it to be free of *a priori* theory, free to 'neutrally' process the data I will collect, is already clouded with my own life perspective" (Glynn, 1991, 81). Work experience in child welfare with Aboriginal Australians "shaped my interest in how child welfare workers understand their practice and why I wanted to study workers with Indian clients" (McMahon's (1993), 9). "Certainly in my case, the fact that I am intentionally childless makes the dissertation personally compelling as well as intellectually engaging" (Morell, 1990, 62). "Finally, I live the life. The issues in this dissertation are my social context. Indian people reviewing it will know" (Colorado, 1986, 196).

Reflection on the changes in the researcher as a result of conducting the study led to new knowledge. Bagwe's (1989) ethnographic study of women in India led to a global connection of women's experiences. "We often overlook the fact that even our own lives are subject to an equally distressing situation all over the world; it is the personal validation of our individual choices that leads to a reaffirmation of our essential humanity" (479). Some participants of Butler's (1991) study of homeless middle-aged women viewed Butler as "part of the system that was oppressing them". "I feel some discomfort about having dropped into their lives for six months and then totally removed myself. I am grappling with the feelings that come with the recognition that I have in fact exploited these women as objects of knowledge" (208–209). "Through this placement in an Indian alcohol program, I would come to face myself and embark on a course of culture and spiritual revitalization, in short, a decolonization which is this dissertation" (Colorado, 1986, 194).

*Insider or Outsider?* One common issue discussed by several researchers was the impact on the study of being an insider or

outsider to the participants' lives. Peled (1993) felt that being an outsider "freed the children to confide with me information they wouldn't want to disclose to someone who is more a part of their world. On the other hand, it may have also deterred some children from sharing their private worlds" (51). Bagwe (1989) moved from a position of outsider to insider. "At a certain stage the force of circumstances ensured that I gave up being an outsider, to simply take over the persona of a village woman—from an unabashedly privileged position compared to poor farm women who became friends and family" (18).

Again, awareness of the issues related to being viewed as an insider or outsider led to new knowledge. Below is an excerpt taken from Smith's (1990) study of Black adolescent fathers.

"This writer, as well as many Black colleagues, have discussed shifting into a "white people mode" at work or at school. This implies greater vigilance and a conscious adaptation of the style of the larger culture. This writer has always experienced it as pulling a shade over one's most essential self. This project assumes that this habit of concealment, of "not putting one's business in the street" is an issue to be dealt with whenever research is conducted in the Black community. In fact, it is as much an issue for Black researchers as well as white researchers, because unless you are known and trusted by the local community, your role as researcher makes you suspect as part of the white power structure. Ultimately, however, it is easier for Black researchers with a similar background to overcome this adaptive hypervigilance" (Smith, 1989, 62–63).

*Empowerment.* For some researchers empowerment of the persons studied was an achieved goal. "I believe that my applause and affirmation of the women when they told me of the actions they had taken in their lives to deal with oppressive situations were empowering. I also believe my acknowledgment and confirmation of their feelings of discrimination was also empowering on some level. . . . The final theme, political awareness, gives hope for collective action by older, homeless-and near homeless-women to demand fairer and more humane social policies" (Butler, 1991, 208–212).

Glynn (1991) posited that participant awareness of issues was by itself empowering. "Clinical social workers might focus

on a practice definition of power that obviates the notion of 'power over' and substitutes the idea of empowerment based on expanded awareness, conscious decision-making, and grounded in a whole person approach" (385).

Theoretical and applied implications of the qualitative research process can be empowering to future clients. "This research documents the existence of violence in the lives of many lesbian women. From a social work perspective, it is less important to count numbers of cases, than to provide treatment effectively to persons seeking treatment for the problem of violence. Typically social workers, even those who identify themselves as lesbian or as feminist, are not informed about lesbian battering" (Groves, 1991, 201). "This study of intentionally childless women, breaking as it does the woman=mother equation, hopefully will contribute to making women's choices more possible. If it does, even in the most modest way, the labor involved has been worth the effort" (Morell, 1990, 242).

### Discussion and Implications

I began this analysis of 54 doctoral dissertations using qualitative research by stating that qualitative research has been questioned as a valid approach to science and that there is a call for setting standards of rigor for conducting qualitative research. The dissertations, qualitative research texts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and recent anthologies of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Riessman, 1994; Sherman & Reid, 1994) are filled with evidence that qualitative research is indeed systematic, empirical science. With this increased credibility of qualitative research coming from its application across disciplines has also come discrepancies on how to promote theoretical and methodological clarity, which brings us full circle to the discussion of standards for evaluating qualitative research.

### *The Unifying Nature of the Term, Qualitative Research*

Throughout this study I have conceptualized qualitative research as a perspective or world view (Ruckdeschel, 1985) which brings persons together who entered the qualitative research

process from a post-positivist paradigm. I use the term, post-positivist "to refer to paradigms that represent genuine breaks with the positivist tradition" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 46). A positivist perspective is a belief that the interaction between researcher and participant can be objective. It is a world view that holds that methodology can achieve controls on researcher bias. Proper methodology then becomes the criteria for determining scientific rigor.

The dissertation samples analyzed in this study illustrated that a qualitative or post-positivist research process itself involves the intricacies of human interaction. The researcher's past work and lived experiences were discussed as these experiences enhanced the researchers' understanding of the participants. The struggle with one's own influence on the data was integrated rather than isolated from the construction of knowledge. Several authors discussed the perception of being an insider or outsider to the participants' environment and how this affected the study results. In many studies the research settings were the social service agency and/or the clients' environments. Recognizing the power the researcher had on the researched led to understanding the power the social worker has on clients. Researchers and practitioners can utilize qualitative research methods to follow the client's lead toward problem resolution. These methods may include checking our interpretations of the data with the client and asking for feedback from clients and other social workers who support and question theories generated from the study.

I realize that not all qualitative research is post-positivist. "Qualitative research is frequently equated erroneously with new (post-positivist) research paradigms, while quantitative research is used mistakenly as a synonym for the standard (positivist) research paradigm" (Heineman Pieper, 1994, 73). I acknowledge that by equating "qualitative research" with post-positivism I have omitted studies which use qualitative methods from a positivist position. I recognize that the metatheory of a heuristic paradigm can be inclusive of qualitative research across paradigms (Heineman Pieper, 1994; Tyson, 1994).

In my early development of understanding and using qualitative research I needed to place the research process in dichotomous terms. "Philosophy forces us to locate the assump-

tions about reality and knowing that undergrid the research methods we choose" (Riessman, 1994, xiii). Explaining our assumptions about the qualitative research process can be cumbersome, overly intellectual, and unapproachable when there are differing conceptualizations of the position from which to explain our assumptions. The value of the current study was to demonstrate how other graduate student researchers navigated the philosophical debates of science and research to choose to conduct a qualitative study. An assumption is that the intellectual debates actually become obstacles to learning and applying qualitative research.

I am now at a place where I can hold onto differing discussions of research paradigms, qualitative research methods, and the growing combination of both. I am excited that more social workers are being trained in qualitative research and that more examples of its application across paradigms is being published. I hope this current study has provided "a place for beginning students to discover the world of qualitative research" and has provided examples from a "diversity across research approaches" (Riessman, 1994, xvii).

#### *Setting Standards to Validate the Credibility of Qualitative Research*

One of the benefits of having a sample from a diversity of research positions was learning the issues various researchers faced in demonstrating the credibility of their results. Credibility refers to documenting the research decisions which resulted in the connections made between the collected data and interpretations of the data. I admit that in the past I have resisted setting a standard for which all research must be judged because I feared that qualitative research would then fall into the limitations of a positivist paradigm—being more concerned with the methodological rules than with the dynamic interchanges between the researcher, researched, and the research question. I also feared that participant-driven research would suffer at the expense of researcher standardization.

Models of evaluating qualitative research designs by giving the researcher guidelines to demonstrate how the results were constructed from the researcher/participant interaction follow basic assumptions of qualitative research (Drisko, 1997; Tyson,



1994). In this current study, I used Drisko's (1997) model to be consistent between my research paradigms, my intended audience, my methods, and my data collection: Following a post-positivist, constructivist paradigm I analyzed data from qualitative doctoral dissertations by constructing themes from the dissertations and placing these themes within the current, growing literature on qualitative research. My intended goal was to help graduate students and faculty understand the intricate interweaving of theory, participant-driven research, and the researcher's position in the qualitative research process.

In this article, the words of other qualitative researchers have been shared to acknowledge the complexities of qualitative research. If we listen to the words and struggles, we will continue to strengthen the application of qualitative research in social work (Imre, 1994). Differences in paradigms supporting qualitative research can actually be inviting rather than obstacles for future qualitative researchers.

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